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ABSTRACT

In 1874, Methodist minister John Vincent began a Sunday school retreat on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, New York, the mission of which was education. Initial offerings such as Bible reading, biblical geography, and public oration were supplemented with general education and entertainment activities. In the late 19th century, the Chautauqua Movement became a popular form of adult education and entertainment in the United States. Using noted lyceum (community-lecture) speakers, such as Teddy Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan, and local talent, the movement spread throughout the country and was particularly popular in the rural areas of the Midwest. This book provides an overview of early lyceum programs and of adult education in 19th-century America, followed by an examination of the growth of the circuit Chautauqua into big business, from its standardization and commercialization to the specific jobs involved in the program. The Chautauqua lecturer, musical features, dramatic arts, and children's activities are described. Its role in supporting U.S. involvement in World War I and its popularity during the 1920s are detailed, as is its demise, brought on by the Great Depression and the rise of the film industry. Developed during a generation that experienced massive social and economic changes, circuit Chautauqua educated people about these changes and helped them deal with the transformation. It also fostered the acceptance of modern forms of mass media such as film and radio. An appendix contains a summary of 20 years of Redpath Chautauqua programs. (Contains a bibliography with 75 references, photographs, and an index.) (TD)

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